

# **South Western Sydney Area Health Service**

## **Child Protection Policy and Procedure: Accessing the Emergency Paging System for contacting the Department of Community Services Helpline**

**May 2004**

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## **1. POLICY STATEMENT**

South Western Sydney Area Health Service is committed to the safety and well being of the children and young people who live in the SWS area.

It is the policy of SWSAHS that, where there are immediate concerns for the safety or well-being of a child or young person and the Department of Community Services Helpline does not respond immediately to attempted telephone contact by a Health worker, the emergency paging system for contacting the Department of Community Services Helpline is to be accessed.

The Emergency Pager system is only to be accessed by designated 'Senior Health Staff'.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Since the implementation of the Department of Community Services Helpline, NSW Health has identified a need for Health staff to be able to access the DoCS Helpline in serious or urgent situations. NSW Health has subsequently negotiated with the Department of Community Services for the implementation of an Emergency Paging system. This paging system is also used by the NSW Police Service.

## **3. TO WHOM DOES THIS POLICY APPLY?**

This policy applies to:

- any person employed by SWSAHS, whether or not they are employed to work directly with children, and
- any person engaged by SWSAHS, such as agency staff, contractors or volunteers.

In this policy "children and young people" refers to persons under the age of 18 years.

## **4. RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **4.1 Responsibilities of all staff**

It is the responsibility of all SWSAHS employees who suspect that a child or young person is at risk of harm to contact the Department of Community Services Helpline and report their concerns.

Where an emergency situation exists and the DoCS Helpline does not immediately respond to an attempt to telephone a report of the situation, it is the responsibility of all SWSAHS employees to follow procedures to access the emergency pager system for contacting the Department of Community Services Helpline.

## 4.2 Responsibilities of 'Senior Health Staff'

It is the responsibility of Senior Health staff holding the emergency pager service number, to assess the information on the case and, if the situation is deemed to be urgent, contact the DoCS pager service (following points 5 & 6 in the procedures outlined below).

**Non-compliance with NSW Health policy to report child abuse and neglect of children and young people (NSW Health Circular 2003/16) may result in disciplinary action.**

## 5. DEFINITIONS

### Emergency Situation

An emergency situation is defined as one in which the child or young person is in danger of serious harm if there is no protective intervention in the immediate future, or where a child or young person is critically injured as a result of a non-accidental injury.

An emergency situation may include situations in which:

- There are immediate concerns that a child or young person presenting with an apparent non-accidental injury will be removed from the Health service by their parent/carer/other person;
- Appropriate medical treatment is refused by a parent/carer/other person for a child or young person with a serious medical condition;
- Other urgent situations where the immediate safety of a child or young person is compromised, for example, where a young child is left alone in the home and a parent has been admitted to a Health service;
- A child or young person is critically injured as a result of a non-accidental injury.

### Senior Health Staff

For the purpose of this policy Senior Health Staff includes:

- Sector General Managers
- Directors of Community Health
- Directors of Nursing
- Senior Nurse Managers
- Directors of Emergency Departments
- Medical Directors
- Staff Specialist Paediatricians
- Senior Social Workers

## **6. PROCEDURES FOR ACCESSING THE EMERGENCY PAGER SYSTEM FOR CONTACTING THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES HELPLINE IN AN EMERGENCY SITUATION**

- 6.1 The situation is assessed by the Health worker as requiring emergency action. If there are concerns about the immediate safety of the child or young person, the Health worker should contact Police (000) and security staff (if the emergency situation is in the Health facility).
- 6.2 The Health worker contacts the DoCS Helpline on the mandatory reporter's line (133627)
- 6.3 If the telephone call to the DoCS Helpline is **not responded to immediately** the Health worker then contacts the relevant 'Senior Health Staff' member and requests that the Emergency Paging procedure be implemented.
- 6.4 The Health worker should provide to the 'Senior Health Staff' member the identified issues and circumstances of the emergency situation.
- 6.5 The 'Senior Health Staff' member should assess the information on the case and, if the situation is deemed to be urgent, should contact the DoCS pager service.
- 6.6 The 'Senior Health Staff' member should provide the following information to the pager service:
  - Urgent response required,
  - The Health worker's name and direct contact number, and
  - The location of the Health service concerned (eg Emergency Department, Liverpool Hospital).

**Under no circumstances is the name, or other identifying information concerning the child or young person, to be given to the pager service.**

## **7. WHAT HAPPENS ONCE THE EMERGENCY PAGER NUMBER HAS BEEN CONTACTED?**

After the Emergency Pager system has been accessed by a senior health officer, the Health worker who requested the emergency access to the Department of Community Services Helpline will be contacted by the Helpline. Normal procedures will then apply. The Health worker should document the contact with the Helpline, and make a note of the DoCS reference number in the client record. In addition, the Health worker should document the fact that the Helpline was accessed via the Emergency Pager system.

## 8. WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- NSW Health Circular 2003/16  
(Available on SWSAHS Child Protection intranet site)

Further information can be obtained from the **SWSAHS Child Protection Policy and Protocols**, *January 2004*.

The following personnel can help with advice and information:

- Deborah Marks, Area Coordinator of Child Protection Services 9828 5992
- Helen Stefanic, Acting Manager, Child Protection Family Service 9828 6116

## 9. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

### 9.1 Distribution

This policy will be distributed through Area Service Directors and Sector General Managers to all unit/service/department managers across SWSAHS.

### 9.2 Implementation

This policy should be incorporated into Sector and Area orientation programs and strategies to ensure compliance and included in Sector Performance Agreements.